
Full Vision Cure? Full Stem Cell Research Required

Posted: June 29, 2010

Created: 29/06/2010 - 15:24

By Don C. Reed

The world is delighted that patients with injured eyes in Italy regained their sight, thanks to the use of stem cells transplanted from their own good eyes. This is a wonderful victory for Dr. Graziella Pellegrini, the University of Modena, and everyone involved. They are doubly to be congratulated because they are working with one hand tied behind their backs. In Italy, it is illegal to fund embryonic stem cell research. So they did what they could with what was allowed.

To give sight to someone who has been blinded in one eye is wonderful indeed.

But to claim this success invalidates the need for embryonic cells, which some have done, would be wrong.

First, the improvement only works on injured eyes, not those damaged by disease or genetic problems. This disqualifies the overwhelming majority of blindness sufferers, such as people with macular degeneration or retinitis pigmentosa. Also, not every injury can be treated. Everything depends on the patient having enough good tissue from the eye to draw cells from. It would be useless to a person born blind.

It has also been reported that another scientist was not able to duplicate Dr. Pellegrini's success. According to a story in Bloomberg News Dr. Ivan Schwab, an ophthalmology professor and stem cell researcher at UC Davis:

“...has treated patients in clinical trials with a procedure based on Pellegrini's work. While his patients improved for a time, the benefits didn't endure.”

Adult stem cell work has been studied for more than half a century; it would be shocking indeed if there were no successes. This particular study began in 1998-the same year human embryonic stem cells were first isolated.

As the father of a paralyzed young man (Roman Reed, inspiration for a California law which has funded embryonic stem cell research) I follow the research closely. This fall, we hope, an embryonic stem cell treatment will go to human trials.

Adult stem cell research is a useful tool. But it is only one tool, not the toolbox.

Patient advocates, like the vast majority of scientists, support full stem cell research, not any single kind to the exclusion of all others.

Don C. Reed

Citizen-sponsor, Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act

Stemcellbattles.wordpress.com

Tags: macular degeneration, Reed

Source URL: <https://www.cirm.ca.gov/blog/06292010/full-vision-cure-full-stem-cell-research-required>